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## Viewing cable 06SOFIA565, SCENESETTER FOR YOUR BILATERAL PROGRAM IN SOFIA

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06SOFIA565**.

| Reference ID               | Created                          | Released                         | Classification               | Origin                        |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <a href="#">06SOFIA565</a> | <a href="#">2006-04-20 14:45</a> | <a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a> | <a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a> | <a href="#">Embassy Sofia</a> |

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.bivol.bg/wlatakarussia.html>

<http://www.mediapool.bg/show/?storyid=179768&srcpos=2>

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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1787  
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RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SOFIA 000565

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR BEYRLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2016

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR YOUR BILATERAL PROGRAM IN SOFIA

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. All of Bulgaria -- and many others in the region -- will be watching April 27 as you and Foreign Minister Kalfin sign in Sofia the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), which gives U.S. military forces access to Bulgarian bases. The long-awaited agreement will be the highlight of your bilateral agenda and a major milestone in our relations with this consistently reliable ally. Bulgaria is working hard to get into the European Union on January 1 and, with troops in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Western Balkans, is boxing above its weight on the world stage. The government has asked for and deserves our active support on behalf of their on-time membership in the EU. They are also looking for your help in casting the DCA as a victory, and in putting the military aspects of our relationship in a larger overall context that includes close political and economic cooperation. Your overall message should be that Bulgaria is a valued partner in the security sphere and across the full range of U.S. interests.

¶2. (C) Passivity in the face of corruption and organized crime has been the weak point not only in this government's record, but its predecessors' as well. This may be starting to change under pressure from the EU and with the appointment of a respected new Chief Prosecutor. The government's ability to actively promote democracy in the Western Balkans or Black Sea region has been hampered by its near-total focus on EU membership, but it is ready in principle to play a role. In the longer term, we should encourage Bulgaria to wean itself from over-dependence on Russian energy. As for domestic politics, the pro-American coalition headed by Socialist Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev, whom you will meet, is stable in the near term, but is held together primarily by the quest for EU membership. President Purvanov will seek this November to be the first Bulgarian President re-elected since the collapse of communism. END SUMMARY.

#### PUTTING THE "BASE AGREEMENT" IN CONTEXT

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¶3. (C) The signing of the Defense Cooperation Agreement is a monumental event for Bulgaria. The Agreement, which gives the U.S. access to two air bases and an army training area, will lay the remaining foundation for the brigade-sized Eastern European Task Force, which will have its headquarters in Romania. The negotiations have been the subject of widespread -- and more often than not, inaccurate -- coverage in the local news media. Many Bulgarians oppose the idea of "foreign bases" on their soil, fear the United States will use Bulgaria as a launching pad to attack Iran, or believe that the U.S. presence will make Bulgaria a target for terrorists. Polls show that the more people learn about the proposed U.S. presence, the less they oppose it, but the government still needs to do more to explain the agreement to the public.

¶4. (C) It is important for the government and the public to hear from you that Bulgaria is a valued and equal partner, not just in the security sphere, but across the entire spectrum of our relationship. There is a strong basis for that judgment. The DCA comes on the heels of a government decision to send troops back to Iraq after campaigning last year on a platform of immediate withdrawal, and coincides with the ramping up of its presence in Afghanistan, where Bulgaria will soon take over security for Kabul airport. Consequently, the government is seeking to shift some of the focus of public discussion away from the military aspects of our relationship and toward the political and economic. Here too, we have a good story to tell. Huge U.S. investments are in the pipeline, including a 1.4 billion dollar power plant built by AES and a Hewlett-Packard call-service center that will create some 1000 knowledge-based jobs. We still lag behind our EU partners in terms of direct foreign investment, but Bulgarian audiences need to hear that we will not be satisfied until we are number one.

## ENERGY DIVERSIFICATION

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15. (C) AES' investment in a new, clean coal-fired power plant will help Bulgaria diversify its dependence on Russian energy, but only marginally. Bulgaria buys 88 percent of its gas and 73 percent of its oil from Russia, resulting as well in a huge bilateral trade deficit. This energy dependency

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was brought home in December when, in a near-replay of events in Ukraine, Gazprom Vice Chairman Medvedev personally threatened Stanishev with a cut-off of Russian supplies if Bulgaria did not agree to renegotiate the terms of its current gas contract. The crisis was eventually defused, but the bottom line is that Bulgaria is paying 35 percent below market prices for its gas, affording Moscow significant potential leverage over Sofia. Helping Bulgaria to avoid putting all its eggs in one basket is a long-term project, but one in which we should remain engaged.

## EU ACCESSION AND RULE-OF-LAW PROBLEMS

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16. (C) The current government is understandably focused on getting into the EU on time. Brussels is sending mixed signals, in part to keep Bulgaria's feet to the fire on reform. Current thinking appears to be that Bulgaria will join the Union as scheduled, but with at least a Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) safeguard clause and continued EU monitoring in that area. The Bulgarians are concerned by rumors the EU may be designing additional monitoring mechanisms for Bulgaria even after accession that could affect the flow of structural funds. President Purvanov has just sent a personal plea to President Bush asking for support of Bulgaria's EU accession. They will likely reiterate this request in their meetings with you.

17. (C) Bulgaria's problems with Brussels are primarily in the area of rule of law. Successive governments have shown little inclination to deal forcefully with the problems of corruption and organized crime, preferring instead to pass new laws and showcase relatively minor enforcement successes. Your message should be that there is no daylight between the U.S. and the EU on this issue: Bulgaria needs to prosecute organized crime bosses cum "businessmen," as well as corrupt politicians. It needs to clean up its system of public procurement, which is plagued by kickbacks and sweetheart deals. And it needs to break the dependence of political parties on cash financing from favor-seeking business interests.

## NURSES IN LIBYA, FLOODS AND KOSOVO

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18. (C) Last but not least, Bulgarians want to hear that we are working hard to secure the release of the five nurses unjustly imprisoned in Libya since 1999. Depending on how the situation develops over the next week, you should also be prepared to express condolences for flood losses along the Danube. And you should privately encourage Bulgarian leaders to continue playing a constructive role on the margins of the Kosovo final status talks by helping to build confidence between the two sides. On that issue, the government seems to accept that Kosovo will gain its independence, but is concerned about a possible spill-over effect, especially in neighboring Macedonia.

## THE POLITICAL SCENE

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19. (C) You will be arriving in a relatively stable political environment, although President Purvanov is already looking at nearly every issue through the lens of the November presidential elections. The three-party coalition led by PM Stanishev has a comfortable majority in parliament. The

government easily survived a perfunctory vote of no-confidence on April 19 by a margin of 161 votes to 61. Events on the horizon, however, could begin to pull the disparate coalition partners in different directions. These include the November presidential election and the conditions linked to EU membership. If Bulgaria gets into the Union on January 1, the *raison d'être* for this coalition will no longer be present, but inertia and the desire to avoid hanging separately may keep the partners together. If accession is delayed, the desire to shift blame among the parties will exert a stronger centrifugal force. Finally, the extreme nationalist Ataka party plans to protest the signing of the DCA during your visit. The protests may draw media attention if for no other reason than that Ataka is such a circus, but we do not believe they can distract from your message.

Beyrle